

Strange, Sylvia.

HOW TO GUIDE A BLIND PERSON

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HOW TO GUIDE A BLIND PERSON



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Mobility of the Blind Association,
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GUIDING A BLIND PERSON.

However proficient at travelling alone, blind people sometimes need help from the sighted. On such occasions, embarrassment and frustration can occur for both parties; the sighted guide is unsure how to help—fusses—and inevitably overdoes things; the blind person feels foolish or murderous depending upon his temperament! These Sighted Guide Skills provide practical means of overcoming the problems. They are designed to give the maximum safety, freedom and relaxation both to the guide and his partner, but like most skills they need to be practised.

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Illustrations by Margery Brotheridge

THE GRIP OR LINKING POSITION

Stand by the side of the blind person with your arms straight, fingers pointing to the ground. Now ask him to take your arm. His hand should grip your arm just above your elbow, so that his fingers are on the inside of your arm and thumb on the outside. His elbow is bent. The grip allows the blind person to be half a pace behind you and he can detect when you're turning, by the movement of your body. There is no need to move your arm. Check that the blind person's toes are pointing in the same direction as yours — if not you could be parting company!

Recap:

From now on we will refer to the Grip Arm, and Grip Hand, which are the ones linking you and your partner together



check direction

WALKING SINGLE FILE

You often need to do this in shops, restaurants and most busy, congested areas. Your partner walks behind you.

Indicate the need to step in behind you, by moving your grip arm to the middle of your back, keeping your arm straight. Maintaining his grip above your elbow, the blind person should step behind you, checking that his arm is straight — if it isn't he will step into your shoes!

If your partner feels uncomfortable with his arm in this 'diagonal' position he can change hands. e.g. if he was gripping your left arm, he can drop his right hand and grip with his left and vice versa.

When there is room again to walk two abreast, return your arm to the normal grip position i.e. at your side, and your partner should step in beside you again.

CHANGING SIDES.

You may need to do this when coming to a doorway — you'll see why in the next paragraph.

While you remain in your position, your partner, keeping his hand in contact with your back, slips behind you and transfers his grip to to your other arm with his other hand. The important thing is that he doesn't lose contact.

Changing sides can be done in a stationary or a moving position.



Walking single file

DOORWAYS

This skill is a little more complicated. You will go through the door first and your partner will follow, closing the door behind you both. Take a look at the door. If the hinge is on the left, the blind person should be on your left side with his left hand free. Describe it as "Door Left".

If the hinge is on the right, the blind person should be on your right side with his right hand free. Describe it as "Door Right".

Positioned correctly? If not Change Sides (as above). Normal arm grip? Now as you turn the handle and move the door, the blind person can distinguish whether the door is moving inwards or outwards. At the same time that you start to walk through, your partner moves the back of his free hand to the door, slides it along and contacts the handle. While you stand, he walks through and slipping his hand round to the other handle closes the door.

ALTERNATIVES

If the blind person has a long cane or guide dog it may be easier, after indicating the position of the door handle, for your partner to release his grip on your arm, until the door has been closed.

If it is your husband who is blind and he prefers to open the door for you, simply position yourselves in front of it. He can then slide his hand to the handle, open the door and allow you to pass through.

Swing Doors — Warn your partner so that he won't attempt to close them.

Finally Remember to open the door with your Grip Arm, otherwise your partner will not be aware that it is being opened.



"Door right"

STEPS & STAIRCASES

No need to count stairs or take the hand-rail if you stick to the following techniques. Whether ascending or descending, the guide travels one step ahead, so that the blind person avoids the embarrassment of taking an imaginary step into space.

STAIRS UP

Facing the stairs in the normal grip, say "stairs up". Step up and place your weight on the first step: as you do so, your partner will feel your arm move slightly upwards — this is his cue to start. As you climb the second step he is on the first. Continue walking in rhythm, you being one step in front and your partner's grip arm being slightly stretched forward and upward, until you reach the top. then, take a slightly larger stride forward and stop; allowing the blind person to negotiate the last step.

AS he feels his arm resume its normal grip position he will know that he is on the level again.



STAIRS DOWN

Very similar to the previous one.

Standing in the grip position, say "stairs down" and stop. To gauge the distance, some blind people first like to slide one foot to the edge.

Now place your foot and weight on the first step. As your partner feels the descending movement he steps down, by which time you are negotiating your second step. His arm is in a downward tilting position. When you reach the bottom, stop and wait for your partner to draw level with you. No need to tell him when he reaches the bottom — he will know because his arm will resume the normal grip position.

If the guide is shorter in height than the blind person, the changing arm movement is not so clearly felt. However, if the guide takes his first step with the foot on the same side as the Grip Arm, the movement is more obvious.



SEATING

IN A LOUNGE. . . IN A RESTAURANT. . . .IN A CHURCH.

NEVER EVER BACK A BLIND PERSON INTO A SEAT!!!!—

It's like shunting an engine into its' sidings! Try this way

SINGLE CHAIRS AND SETTEES.

If possible approach the chair centrally, but whether it's from the side, the back, or the front, always place your grip hand on the back of the chair. There is no need to tell your partner the position of the back, your arm movement is sufficient. Now, let your partner slide his hand down your arm to the chair back. Your job is now over, it is up to him to move into the chair, feeling the side of it with the calf of the leg and if necessary checking the seat depth with the hand.



CHAIRS WITH TABLES

Guide your partner to the table and use the previous procedure to locate the back of the chair. With the one hand on the back, he can move his other one forward to locate the table, this indicates how far to pull the chair out, before sitting down.

Not sure if you are 'square' to the table?

Try this tip. Bring the thumbs together on the edge or under the table. Then slide them out to either side. If the edge appears slanting, adjust the chair accordingly.

ALTERNATIVES

If your husband is blind and wishes to seat you at the table, agree beforehand on which side of you he will sit. Approach your chair so that your husband is directly in front of it. If necessary put your grip hand on the back so that he can contact it directly, then let go. His other hand will locate the table on the opposite side of the chair from which you step in. After seeing you safely seated and tucked into the table he can then locate his own chair.

ROWS OF SEATS— IN THEATRES, CHURCHES, ETC.

Maintain the normal grip position as you move down the aisle. Most blind people prefer, on reaching the row of seats, that the guide leads into them (If necessary Change Sides.)

Both must now sidestep — step — pause — step etc. Stop at your seats, make sure you have placed your partner centrally to his seat and leave the rest to him The show is over, you are leaving: step to the other side of your partner so that you can lead out in the same side-stepping manner. On reaching the aisle you are still facing the stage — make an

ABOUT TURN

Here's how. Release the grip — turn in to face each other, then turn again to face the exit — in other words you turn from 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock or turn 180 degrees. This turn saves space — especially useful for steps in a narrow aisle.

KERBS

One of the simplest skills and yet one which often presents problems. There is no need for you to say each time you come to a kerb, just pause slightly before stepping up or down it: your partner will feel the change in arm movement.

Some roads have cambers or slopes to the kerb, which some people detect as they walk across the road.

Many modern roads have broad rounded kerbs: make sure you approach them at their centre, so that you are square on - - - if you don't your partner may reach the kerb before you do.

BUSES AND COACHES

Most blind people don't want to draw attention to themselves, and this is very likely to happen on public transport, unless you both have the situation in hand. Fellow passengers are kind, but many an unsuspecting blind person has been instructed, pushed or lifted into a seat, only to find himself sitting on somebody's lap.

There are no hard and fast rules for buses and coaches as they vary so much in design: however the blind person should remember when getting on a bus that

On front opening buses the seats are facing you.

On back opening buses the backs of the seats are facing you

Here are a few other general points both for entering and leaving the vehicle.

Approach the entrance so that your partner can easily locate a hand rail with his free hand.

Use the "Walking Single File" position as you climb the steps and walk down the centre aisle.

When you reach a vacant seat — — try and manoeuvre in first and let your partner be guided by your link arm.

When you're getting off, it can be tricky, especially if you have shopping and a Grand Prix driver, but have confidence in your Guiding Skills, and make full use of the "Walking Single File" position. Try and avoid "handling" your partner and giving lots of instructions.

CARS

There is no need to put your partner into the car; simply place your grip hand on the passenger door handle and tell your partner which way the car is facing. His grip hand then slides down your arm and locates the handle while the other finds the roof. You can now walk around to the driving seat. The passenger, having opened the door and ducked his head, transfers his hand from the roof to the seat, either steps in, or sits and swings his legs round, and finally closes the door.

GETTING OUT.

The passenger must check with you first that it is all clear to open the door. Then he can open the door with one hand and find the roof with the other. On stepping out he locks the door before closing it.



Grip hand is placed on door handle

THIS IS NOT..... THE END

Because, hopefully you will continue using these skills. Maybe you will improve upon certain ones to suit your individual circumstances: perhaps they have confirmed most of what you already know. Whatever the circumstances, we wish you good speed; happy landing and a grip relaxed enough to ensure normal blood circulation!

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